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DEFENSE ISSUES

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In this new world, global U.S. leadership is more important than ever. America is leading in building a new network of institutions and arrangements to harness the forces of change, while guarding against their dangers.

Volume 13 Number 5

Helping Write 21st Century International Rules

Remarks by President Bill Clinton at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, Jan. 29, 1998.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Gen. [Henry H.] Shelton [chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], for those kind remarks and for your little walk through memory lane about our association together. My most vivid memory of my association with Gen. Shelton is when he walked out of the water and looked down at the Haitian dictator and said he thought he would have to go. And I thought to myself, we should have just sent him down here by himself. I thank you for your leadership.

Thank you, Secretary [of Defense William S.] Cohen, for your remarks and for your extraordinary leadership of the Defense Department and for helping us to demonstrate every day that this is not a Democratic or a Republican effort, or a Democratic or Republican administration when it comes to the defense of this country and the welfare of the American people and our men and women in uniform.

To the members of the Joint Chiefs, the commanders in chief, [Army Maj.] Gen. [Richard A.] Chilcoat [president, National Defense University], the students of the National Defense University, faculty and others -- I am delighted to be here, at a place where education, experience and excellence make a common home. I'm especially pleased to be here with the members of the Joint Chiefs and our commanders in chief, whose 68 stars form a shining constellation of talent and achievement.

We have just had a wonderful meeting. And each of the commanders in chief has shared a few moments with me, and we've had a little conversation discussing the whole range of America's security interests, the whole range of the concerns of people who are managing the welfare of our men and women in uniform. And I must say that I couldn't help thinking, during the course of this meeting, I wish every person who wears the uniform of the United States could be watching this on closed-circuit television, because they'd have so much confidence in the leadership of our military.

And in a larger sense, I wish every American citizen could have seen it because they would feel so much more pride, even than [they] do now, in the way our military is led, the thinking about the future that is going on, the innovation that is going on, and the profound concern for the people who wear our nation's uniform -- as well as what I consider to be an enormous sensitivity to the increasing interdependence of our United States with other countries and the necessity of more creative, positive partnerships around the world. And I know we have people here from other nations in this audience today, and I welcome you here.

Twelve of the commanders in chief behind me are graduates of National Defense University. They indicate the value of this university to the nation. They also indicate that in the not too distant future, some of you out there will be sitting up here, or will otherwise be helping to shape the future of the United States. For that I am very grateful.

In my State of the Union address, I talked about what we all have to do together to strengthen America for the 21st century. Today, I wanted to meet with you, the future stewards of our national security, to talk about the foundation of our strength -- our military, and the essential role it will play in this era of

challenge and change.

You all know that we live in a time of tremendous promise for our nation in the world. Superpower conflict has ended. Democracy is on the march. Revolutions in technology and communications have literally brought a world of information to our doorstep. Americans are more secure and prosperous than ever. And we have a rare opportunity and a profound responsibility to build a new era of peace and cooperation in the world.

Even as we welcome this hopeful new moment, we all acknowledge -- especially those of you who are here studying it -- that the world is far from free of risk. Challenges persist, often in more complex guises, from the spread of weapons of mass destruction, to the menace of rogue states, to the persistence of religious, ethnic and regional conflict. The openness and freedom of movement that we so cherish about this modern world actually make us more vulnerable to a host of threats -- terrorists, drug cartels, international criminals -- that have no respect for borders and can make very clever use of communications and technology.

In this new world, our global leadership is more important than ever. That doesn't mean we can go it alone or respond to every crisis. We have to be clear where our national interests are at stake. But more than ever, the world looks to America to get the job done. Our nation is leading in building a new network of institutions and arrangements to harness the forces of change, while guarding against their dangers. We are helping to write the international rules of the road for the 21st century, protecting those who've joined the family of nations and isolating those who do not.

To advance this strategy, we have to preserve and strengthen the tools of our engagement of fully funded diplomacy backed by a strong and modern defense. Diplomacy and force are two sides of the same coin. Our diplomacy is effective precisely because it is backed by the finest military in the world. Nothing illustrates the scope of our interests or the purpose of our power better than our unified commands.

No other nation in history has achieved a global force presence -- not through intimidation, not through invasion -- but through invitation. That is an extraordinary thing. No other nation has acquired mastery of land, sea, sky and space, and use[d] it to help advance world peace, instead of to pursue conquest.

The military commanders who share this stage and the forces they lead know their first mission must be always to be ready to fight and win our nation's wars. But day in and day out around the world they are shaping an international environment, enhancing the security of America in the world so that peace can endure and prevail.

In our own hemisphere, where elected civilian governments now reign, American leadership is spurring greater military cooperation than ever, promoting regional confidence, working together as peacekeepers, supporting law enforcement efforts against drugs. Through the defense ministerial of the Americas, with the assistance of the NDU, we are finding new ways to advance common goals, such as healthy civil military relations and respect for human rights.

In Europe, our armed forces are reinforcing the foundations of an undivided democratic continent. They've helped new democracies to restructure their own defense. They have participated in dozens of joint exercises with new partners. They stopped a brutal war in Bosnia, and they're helping to heal its scars.

During my meeting with the CinCs, I talked with [Army] Gen. [Wesley K.] Clark, our supreme allied commander in Europe, about our Bosnia mission. I am very proud of the men and women who are representing all of us in Bosnia. But perhaps even more important, they're pretty proud of them themselves. They know that they have stopped the guns, enabled free elections, made it possible for refugees to come home, given the children of Bosnia the precious gift of peace.

Yes, the progress has been slower than we had hoped but clearly it is moving forward. If we walk away, it could backslide into war, costing the lives of more innocent people, jeopardizing Europe's stability. Last month, I concluded that our troops should take part in a follow-on security presence when the

SFOR [stabilization force] mission leaves in June. Soon, NATO will finish its review of what forces are appropriate for the new mission. And this spring, I will submit funding requests to ensure that we can pay our share without undercutting our readiness. I'll be working closely with Congress to ensure approval of this important legislation.

The NATO-led efforts in Bosnia reflect our hope for Europe's future as former rivals work together for stability and peace. Soon, I'll ask the Senate to give its advice and consent to make Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic NATO's newest members. By enlarging the sphere of security in Europe, we can secure democracy's roots and help to prevent conflicts like Bosnia from happening again.

We're also working to strengthen democracy and peace in Africa by helping Africans to help themselves. Through the Africa Crisis Response Initiative, we're helping African militaries to improve their peacekeeping capabilities so they can respond to crisis more quickly and effectively and stop trouble from escalating into tragedy.

And just as our interests span the Atlantic, so they bridge the Pacific. In our meeting today, Adm. [Joseph W.] Prueher, the commander in chief of our Pacific Command and [Army] Gen. [John H.] Tilelli [Jr.], the commander of U.S. Forces, Korea, confirmed that the 100,000 troops they lead continue to perform superbly -- from the soldiers of the Korean DMZ [demilitarized zone] who sleep in their uniforms, ready to stop an invasion at a moment's notice, to the Marines and the sailors on the ships of the 7th Fleet forward deployed in Japan -- our troops provide the bedrock of stability on which Asia's peace and America's interests depend.

In recent years, we've strengthened our treaty alliances with Japan, with Thailand, with South Korea, Australia and the Philippines. We persuaded North Korea to halt its dangerous nuclear program. We've launched talks that can bring about a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. We're deepening our areas of agreement with China, while dealing with our differences frankly and openly.

We're working with our partners to restore Asia's financial stability, as we build a secure and prosperous Asia-Pacific community. Our troops make clear that America is committed to remaining a Pacific power, and every day they help the Pacific region live up to its name.

America also has vital interests in a stable Persian Gulf region. It's home to two-thirds of the world's oil resources and some of its most hostile regimes. [Marine Corps] Gen. [Anthony C.] Zinni, our commander in chief of the Central Command, provided me today with an up-to-date assessment of [Iraqi President] Saddam [Hussein]'s latest challenge to the community of nations.

Since Desert Storm, America has worked steadily and persistently to contain the threat Saddam poses, through sanctions that deny him billions every year to rebuild his military, and where necessary, with force. We struck Iraq's intelligence headquarters after its agents plotted to murder President Bush. We convinced Saddam to pull back his troops from Kuwait's border in 1994. We tightened the strategic straitjacket on him by extending the no-fly zone when he attacked the Kurds in 1996.

As I said in the State of the Union address, we know that Saddam has used weapons of mass destruction before. We again say he should comply with the UNSCOM [U.N. Special Command] regime and the will of the United Nations. But, regardless, we are determined to deny him the capacity to use weapons of mass destruction again. Preventing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons from winding up in the wrong hands is among the primary challenges we face in the new security environment. Nineteen ninety-eight will be a decisive year for our arms control and nonproliferation agenda.

I'm very pleased that four chairmen of the Joint Chiefs -- [Army] Gen. [John M.] Shalikashvili, [Army] Gen. [Colin L.] Powell, Adm. [William J.] Crowe and [Air Force] Gen. [David C.] Jones -- have just this week announced their support for Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The treaty will help to prevent the development of new and more dangerous weapons and make it more difficult for nonnuclear states to build them. The Senate should ratify it this year.

We are also committed to toughen the Biological Weapons Convention by establishing an international

inspection system to track down and crack down on cheating. And we'll continue to urge the Russian Duma to ratify START II [Strategic Arms Reduction Talks treaty], paving the way for START III, and even deeper nuclear weapons reduction. [Air Force] Gen. [Eugene E.] Habiger, commander of America's Strategic Command, understands the importance of arms control and addressing the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Today, he and I reviewed the steps we've taken to ensure that our nuclear deterrent force remains safe, reliable, effective and unchallenged well into the 21st century.

One of the key reasons that all of these efforts can be successful is the skill of our military. And one of the greatest privileges of my job, as I said earlier, has been seeing our military at work.

At home and abroad, from Haiti to Bosnia, from Japan to Kuwait, at sea and on shore, it makes no difference where they're stationed, the rank they hold or how many ribbons they wear, our servicemen and women reflect America's highest standards of skill, discipline and service. They are the patriots who answer the call whenever our nation needs them -- heroes who man their stations around the clock so the rest of us can sleep without fear. Hardship, uncertainty and separation from loved ones are a part of the job. Many have missed the birth of their own sons and daughters to make the rest of our children safer.

Part of the reasons I wanted to come here today, to one of our top military educational institutions, in the company of our military leadership, is to bring home to the American people the extraordinary service of our military men and women and all they do to protect our nation and bear the burden of our global leadership.

In times of peace, it's tempting to ignore that the dangers to that kind of service exist -- but they do. When the guns are silent it's easy to forget that our troops are hard at work -- but they are. We must never, never take our nation's security, or those who provide it, for granted. Defending our nation is difficult and dangerous work, even in peacetime.

Most Americans, for example, have absolutely no idea that we lose about 200 of our servicemen and women in training accidents and in the course of regular duty every single year. People like [Army] Pvt. Michael Harrington and [Army] Pfc. Brenda Frederick, who were killed just this week in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., when their truck rolled over and burst into flames during a night-blackout-drive training. People like Capt. Lynn Svoboda, who went down with her A-10 fighter while training in Arizona last summer, the first female Air Force fighter pilot to die in a military plane crash.

I think the American people ought to know that. And I hope all of you, as you go out and you have communications with your family and friends around the country, will just say that in passing, and ask your family members and your friends to share it with their fellow citizens. It is not easy to wear the uniform, and it is never a completely safe proposition.

As president, the hardest decision I ever have to make is to put our troops in harm's way. Force can never be the first answer, but sometimes, still, it is the only answer.

We must, and we will, always do everything we can to protect our forces. We must and will always make their safety a top priority, as I did on the issue of anti-personnel mines. But we must be strong and tough and mature as a nation -- strong and tough and mature enough to recognize that even the best-prepared, best-equipped force will suffer losses in action.

Every casualty is a tragedy all its own for a parent or a child or a friend. But when the cause is just and the purpose is clear, our military men and women are prepared to face the risk. The American people have to be, as well. As the inscription on the Korean War Memorial says, "Freedom isn't free."

Our obligation to our servicemen and women is to do all we can to help them succeed in their missions, to provide the essential resources they need to get the job done. This week I will submit to Congress my defense budget request for the coming fiscal year -- a budget that is fully consistent with the Quadrennial Defense Review. Readiness remains our No. 1 priority, and my budget provides for the readiness we need in a hopeful but still hazardous time. It makes the enhancements in quality of life that our service personnel and their families deserve. It funds the procurement of sophisticated weapons to make sure our

troops can be certain of victory, no matter how uncertain the future.

Our military leaders understand that tomorrow's force must be agile, effective and lean -- not only in its personnel but in its operations. Secretary Cohen, working with Gen. Shelton and [Air Force] Gen. [Joseph W.] Ralston, [vice chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff] has put together a far-reaching defense reform initiative to revolutionize the way we do the business of defense -- streamlining operations, spurring competition, emphasizing efficiency.

If our armed forces are to have the training, the readiness, the equipment, the personnel to man the frontiers of freedom abroad, Congress must do its part by making tough choices here at home. That includes closing down bases we no longer need, stripping away excess infrastructure, not adding funds for unneeded or lower-priority projects.

Let our common commitment be to support our troops. Let that be the bottom line. And let us uphold in the future, as well as the past, the legacy of our American leadership.

Earlier today, as I walked into my meeting with our CinCs and members of the Joint Chiefs, I saw emblazoned on the wall a quote from Gen. George Marshall. It read, "We are now concerned with the peace of the entire world. And the peace can only be maintained by the strong."

Those words are no less true today than the day they were spoken by Gen. Marshall. America's leadership is no less imperative today than the day Gen. Marshall spoke those words.

Our strength is every bit as important. But more than just maintaining the peace, now we have a chance to shape the future, to build a world more secure, more prosperous than any we have ever known, to give our children a world that our own parents could not even have dreamed of. Our nation will continue to look to our armed forces to pursue that historic mission. And I know, because of people like you, our armed forces will never let us down.

Thank you, and God bless you.

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